



West Valley View

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Tuesday, September 18, 2007

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Interstate 10 has been designated as one of several "Corridors of the Future" under a federal program to identify and deal with traffic congestion on federal highways.

The program will give a coalition of states along Interstate 10 from Florida to California, including Arizona, \$8.6 million to deal with widening a couple of areas of I-10. None of the money would go to the I-10 in the West Valley.

But the \$8.6 million recently awarded is just the beginning of the program, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters said Sept. 14 in an interview with the *West Valley View* following a speech before Westmarc, a coalition to promote a positive image for Maricopa County.

Corridors of the Future "is a very important project that we think will help trade, tourism and commerce flow," Peters, a former Peoria resident, said.

Peters' speech was given to 250 people in the Glendale Civic Center.

The I-10 plan not only would build additional lanes, but also could include truck-only lanes and bypasses and the use of real-time lane-management traffic technology, the I-10 corridor plan states.

The recent \$8.6 million allocation would include money to widen I-10 between Interstate 8 and the Gila River Indian Community reservation. The other \$4.6 million would widen a portion of I-10 in Louisiana.

Future projects could include funding construction of an I-10 bypass around Phoenix and separation of trucking and automobile lanes along I-10 in the Phoenix and Tucson metropolitan areas, a fact sheet for the Corridors of the Future program states.

Some of the facts about I-10:

- The I-10 corridor is more than 2,400 miles long.
- Seven hundred miles run through urban areas.
- Among the 700 miles of urban segments, 53 percent are currently seeing heavy congestion.

Peters did not specifically address I-10 in her comments to the Westmarc audience, although she spoke more generally about the need for Congress to cut back considerably on the money that states send to Washington, D.C., and to instead allow states and local governments to use that money themselves.

Besides the "bureaucratic overhead" of collecting and then redistributing money, much of that money goes to projects of dubious value, Peters said.

"Money that should be going to maintain roads, build new freeways, and reduce congestion is going instead to restore lighthouses and build new museums," Peters said.

Peters criticized congressional earmarks, which are a bureaucratic way of describing "pork barrel projects" designed to boost federal spending in Congressional members' own districts.

The number of earmarks has risen dramatically, from just a few in the mid-1980s to more than 6,000 in 2005, Peters said.

"Earlier this week, the Senate passed a one-year spending bill that includes an additional \$2 billion in earmarks," Peters said. "As some of you may have read, this bill includes money for 'key transportation priorities' - remember the traffic that you all deal with every day - like a peace garden, a baseball stadium, and a history museum."

"Despite all the rhetoric over the past six weeks on the need to focus on our infrastructure priorities, Congress still doesn't get it," Peters said.

"Proposing new federal gas tax increases is not leadership; it is ludicrous," Peters said. "Americans are tired of paying for excellent bridges to nowhere and horrible commutes to everywhere else."

Some traffic congestion could be alleviated by convincing 5 percent to 10 percent of the motorists to shift their drive times, Peters said. That's not so difficult because studies have found that about half of all the motorists driving during the morning and afternoon "rush hours" are not on their way to or from work, she said.

Toll roads also could be employed to force people to change their driving habits, Peters said.

"Cell phone companies create capacity by charging us during the week and giving us free weekend minutes," Peters said. "Why can't we do the same for our roads?"

Portions of Interstate 15 in San Diego and Interstate 394 in Minneapolis already are using tolls, Peters said.

"This approach requires us to think differently about highways," Peters said. "It requires us to recognize that there is no such thing as a free highway."

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